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EXCAVATION AT AGROHĀ, PUNJAB

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PREFACE

The excavation described in the following pages was carried out by me in 1938-39 as Superintendent of the Frontier Circle, Lahore. Almost immediately afterwards, the publication of the *Annual Reports of the Archaeological Survey of India*, where the report was to appear, was suspended as a result of war-time restrictions on printing, and later on the publication of the series was altogether abandoned.

These facts will explain the delay in the publication of the report, but the difficulties did not end here. The antiquities and records of the excavation, kept in the office of the Frontier Circle, became inaccessible to us after the partition of India. The result has been that some of the line-drawings had to be reproduced from the photographs of the drawings which were available on this side of the border. A proper selection of pottery and other antiquities for illustration had also to be ruled out for the same reason. The author is fully alive to these shortcomings in the report, but feels that notwithstanding these the report may be of some use to archaeologists, especially those who may later on resume the excavation at Agrohā or explore the neighbouring areas.

H. L. S.

NEW DELHI :
April 15, 1951.

LIST OF PLATES

EXCAVATION AT AGROHĀ, PUNJAB

Agrohā is situated on the metalled road between Hissār and Fatehābād at a distance of 14 miles from the former. A series of rolling mounds of varying heights, the highest being about 87 feet above the surrounding ground level (pl. I), occupy about 650 acres of land towards the north-west of the village known by the name of Agrohā. Tradition avers that Rājā Agra, later named as Agra Sain, used to live here and the remains of the Fort on the top of the mound are connected with his residence[1].

It can be said with a certain degree of accuracy that Agrohā owes its origin to Agra and the ancient name of the town was *Agrodaka* as revealed on the coins found in the excavation. The Fort, however, on the top was constructed by Dewān Nannomal, who was an Agrawal by caste and in the employ of Rājā Amar Singh of Patiāla (A.D. 1765-1781)[2].

Agrohā appears to have been mentioned by Ptolemy, who calls it 'Agara' which cannot be identified with Agra (U.P.) or Agar near Ujjain, as ascertained by Reynal[3] on the authority of Bernoulli a French traveller in A.D. 1781. In the medieval period Ziāu'-d Dīn Baranī[4] and Shams-i-Sirāj 'Afīf[5] have described Agrohā or 'Agrah' as a flourishing town forming an important division of the newly laid town of Ḥiṣār-i-Fīrūza. The severe famine in Muḥammad Tughluq's time had caused considerable havoc at Agrohā and it was a deserted city as evidenced by Ibn-i-Baṭūṭa[6]. The latter gives an account of the demolition of the Hindu temples and buildings and the utilization of the material by Fīrūz Shāh Tughluq in constructing his Ḥiṣār-i-Fīrūza. The buildings like Gujrī Maḥal, Fīrūz Shāh's Mosque and Jahāz Koṭhī at Hissār and the mosque at Fatehābād bear testimony to this fact.

It was in the year 1888-89 when Mr. C. J. Rodgers[7], Archaeological Surveyor of the Punjab Circle, carried out partial excavations on one of the smaller mounds to a depth of 16 ft. and unearthed solid brick walls and floors, paved causeways and abundance of ashes and signs of burning. His diggings were restricted to 15 days only and the objects which he brought to light consisted of coins, beads, fragments of sculptures and terracottas encrusted with lime, bearing signs of burning.

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1 Dr. Satyaketu's book *Agrawāl Jāti Kā Prāchin Itihāsa* contains valuable information which has gratefully been used by me.

2 Griffin, *Punjab Rajas & Punjab State Gazetteers*, Vol. XVII A.

3 J. W. McCrindle, *Ancient India as described by Ptolemy*, p. 154.

4 Elliot, *The History of India*, Vol. III, p. 245.

5 *Ibid*, p. 300.

6 *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. III, p. 153.

7 *Report of the Punjab Circle of the Archaeological Survey* for 1888-89, pp. 41-43.

In 1938-39 a portion of the high and extensive mound immediately to the south of the road was taken up for trial excavations. This mound, like others, was thickly littered with brickbats all over the surface. Rains have in the past been responsible for cutting numerous gorges in the mound exposing occasionally to view the remains of walls. The choice of this particular spot for operation was partly influenced by the remains of a solid brick wall about 6 ft. high which was revealed in one such ravine, running from north to south and cutting right across the heart of the mound. Here a trench, 500′ long and 30′ wide running east to west, was sunk to a depth of 12 ft. below surface (pl. II A). The work was further extended towards the north where a trench measuring 80 ft. × 30 ft. (its width was 55′ upto the first 45′ in length from the point where it met the main trench) and running north to south was joined to the main trench at right angle to form a T shape (pl. III). The last 120′ of the eastern fringe of the main trench lie on a steep slope of the mound. Out of this length 40 ft. at the extreme east were availed of for digging deep pits and the rest for terraced excavation consisting of 4 steps, each measuring 30′ ×20′ with an average height of 6 ft. The last step was levelled to 40′× 30′ in Sqrs. 7p/2, 3, 7 and 8 and the two pits sunk alternately in Sqrs. 7p/3 and 7 were carried to 26½ ft. below the surface of the mound (pl. II B). The bottom of the pit is about 2 ft. higher than the road level. I shall now describe the trench and take up the pits later which brought to light antiquities of far reaching importance.

The trench revealed the remains of a well-planned and prosperous settlement. All the structures were of burnt brick and pertained to dwelling houses easily distinguishable from each other, the full extent of each not yet being clear (pl. III). Except a few fragmentary walls and pavements in sub-squares 7L/1, 2, 7M/5, 10, which were only 2 ft. below the surface of the mound and were thus assigned to the 1st stratum, the entire structures in the trench were of the second stratum, though tops of walls of the third stratum were struck here and there.

All the rooms in the trench were uniformally excavated to an average depth of 12 ft. Some of the rooms in the south-western side were mostly paved. An example of a small shrine in the wall of a room was revealed in square 7L/2 (pl. IV A). The entrances to rooms were well defined by prominent door-sills (pl. IV B). No charred wood pertaining to door frames was found ; but the use of wooden doors can be inferred from the recovery of a large number of iron objects, *viz.*, nails, flat bars, door-rings, clasps and clamps, etc., all accessories to wooden door-frames.

A deposit of ashes and signs of burning were found in almost all the rooms at various depths covered by squares 7K and 7L; particularly in the rooms in squares 7L/4, 5 which appear to be important as they yielded burnt birch bark manuscript, clay seal, inscribed die and burnt sculptures, a small gold bead and charred grains, etc. Deposit of white lime was also found in the rooms in squares 7N/1, 2. It may also be remarked that no single scuplture was found in tact but fragments of several sculptures were recovered bearing distinct traces of burning.

No antiquities worth mentioning were found in the first stratum ; but the second was as varied and rich in portable objects as the labyrinth of well-laid out rooms. About 401 antiquities were brought to light in the trench up to an average depth of 12 ft. comprising pottery, terracotta and copper objects, fragments of stone sculptures, plaques, grinding stones, beads, shell bangles, coins, iron implements and objects including accessories to wooden door-frames, inscribed clay die, a burnt birch bark manuscript and a clay seal.

The pottery objects consisted mostly of big earthen jars with incised lines around (pl. V A) spouted jars, *hāndīs*, perforated vases and bowls, vases with and without spouts, dabbers, incense burners, cups, lids and dishes (pls. V B and VI A and B). No painted pottery was found except an earthen spouted jar, which had the black design of wavy eye-lids above the spout. Specimens of pottery objects with their numbers have been shown in measured drawings (pls. VII and VIII).

Among the selected terracotta objects found in the trench mention may be made of a heavily incised dish (pl. IX, 1), four colour-boxes (two illustrated, pl. IX, 2 and 3), a decorated rattle (pl. IX, 4) and a small model shrine (pl. IX, 5). Two round terracotta decorated tablets (pl. IX, 6 and 7) and one flat oval tablet pierced with two holes in the centre and a circular groove running all round (pl. IX, 8) probably meant for winding thread—were found in squares 7P/3 and 7N/3 at a depth of 3′ and 4′ respectively. A number of terracotta animal figurines were picked up from the trench, *e.g.*, horses (pl. IX, 9-11), bulls (pl. IX, 12-14), and dogs (pl. IX, 15). A beautiful spout resembling the neck of a peacock was found at a depth of 6′ in square 6O/10 (pl. IX, 16).

The noteworthy copper objects recovered were a sword in square 7M/2 at a depth of 8′ 6″ (pl. IX, 17), spoon at a depth of 10′ 6″ (pl. IX, 18), chain in square 6L/19 at a depth of 6′ (pl. IX, 19), bangle (diam. $1\frac{3}{4}$″) in square 7N/3 at a depth of 5′ (pl. IX, 20), ear ornament in square 7N/1 at a depth of 1′, which is of the 1st stratum (pl. IX, 21), and a copper discoid spacer in square 7L/4 at a depth 8′ 6″ (pl. IX, 22).

Many stone sculptures, but all in fragments and showing signs of burning, were found in squares 7L/4 and 5 (pl. X, 5-7). One sculpture pieced together found in 7L/4 at a depth of 9′ 4″ represents an image standing on lotus supported by Nāgas (ht. 1′ $7\frac{1}{2}$″, pl. X, 1).

Among the plaques (length $2\frac{1}{2}$″ to $5\frac{3}{4}$″) found in squares 7K/10, 7L/2, 7L/4 and 6L/20 at a depth of 7′ to 10′, three are of stone (pl. X, 2, 3 and 4) ; and one of terracotta (pl. X, 8). Mahishāsuramardini is represented in pl. X, 4 and 8, a seated image with a female standing by in pl. X, 3 and probably a Kubera in pl. X, 2.

A few grinding stones and pestles were found in square 7N/1 (pl. XI, 5). A stone pedestal (9″ × $8\frac{1}{4}$″ × $\frac{3}{4}$″) showing hunting scene was recovered from square 6L/19 at a depth of 7′ (pl. XI, 1) and also several architectural pieces pertaining to a temple containing decorations and figures in the panels (pl. XI; 2-4).

Beads of agate, carnelian, shell, pottery and glass, of different shapes, were found mostly in squares 7K, 7L, 7N and 7P (pl. XI, 7-11) noteworthy among them being a copper barrel-shaped bead found in square 7L/4 at a depth of 6½′ (pl. XI, 8) and a tiny gold bead in square 7L/5 at a depth of 10′ (pl. XI, 9). A decorated pottery terminal was found in square 7P/3 at a depth of 6′ (pl. XI, 10).

Among miscellaneous finds mention may be made of finger rings, one of ivory and another of horn (pl. XI, 12-13), shell bangles plain and incised (pl. XI, 14-17) and a libation spoon of horn found in square 7N/2 at a depth of 8′ (pl. XI, 6).

Thirteen copper coins, all obliterated and undecipherable, were found in squares 6L/24, 7L/4, 7L/5, 7M/10, 7N/2 and 7O/10, at a depth ranging from 6′ to 11½′.

A heap of iron objects was unearthed from squares 6L/14, 7L/4 and 7L/5 at a depth ranging from 6′ to 10½′. It included a variety of objects, *e.g.*, hanging bells (pl. XII, 1), dishes (pl. XII, 2), lamp with handle (pl. XII, 5), axes and sickles (pl. XII, 3-4), handles of sticks (pl. XII, 6 and 8), nails (pl. XII, 9), ring (pl. XII, 7) etc., accessories to wooden door-frames.

Besides the finds mentioned above, three inscribed objects, *viz.*, an inscribed terracotta tablet, burnt birch bark manuscript and clay seal deserve special mention.

The terracotta tablet with handle, measuring 7¾″ × 1⅝″ × 1⅞″, found in square 7K/4 at a depth of 11′ 3″, contains the seven *svaras* or notes of the musical scale in the reverse order, *viz.*, *sa*, *ni*, *dha*, *pa*, *ma*, *ga*, *ri*, *sa* in the script of the 9th century A. D. (pl. XIII, 1).

The text of the burnt birch bark manuscript found in square 7L/5 at depth of 5′ cannot be identified as it is only in very small fragments (pl. XII, 10). The script resembles the Bakhshāli manuscript, ascribed to the 9th century A. D. on palaeographical grounds. It is a pity that the manuscript was found burnt and thus a valuable record has been lost.

A clay seal (2¾″ × 2¼″ × 1″) with a hole was found in square 7L/5 at a depth of 8′ (pl. XIII, 2). It bears marks of severe burning and the legend on the seal below the bull in Brāhmī is damaged to ensure satisfactory decipherment. As suggested by Dr. N. P. Chakravarti, a tentative reading of the first line as *Pāvaneśa* [*Rudre*] is given. In the second line only two letters *dha* and *ma* are visible and this may again be tentatively restored to *dharmma*. It will not be wrong to assume that the epithet *Pāvaneśa* given to Rudra (if the reading is correct) is not improper as Rudra is also *agnimūrti*. *Pāvaneśa* may also mean 'pure' and the epithet to Rudra is in no way thus inappropriate. It may be mentioned that the bull as *Vāhana* of Śiva has been found on seals in the excavations at Basārh, Besnagar, Bhīṭā, Kauśāmbī, etc., also on several Yaudheya clay seals.

The two pits sunk alternately in squares 7P/3 and 7P/7 yielded 128 portable antiquities and a ring-well (diam. 2′ 8″). The top ring corresponded to the ground level of the period which is 23′ 6″ below the surface. Internally the well was cleared to a depth of 3′ where evidence of four rings closely laid one upon the other was found.

Of the portable antiquities found in the pits, mention may be made of two crude terracotta human figurines found at a depth of 3′ 6″ and 4″ respectively (pl. XIII, 3).

A small hoard of five silver coins (pl. XIII, 4-5), buried in a pottery vase (pl. XIII, 6), was found in square 7P/3 at a depth of 14′. It contained one coin each of Antialkidas, Apollodotos, Strato, Amyntas and one punch-marked coin with solar and tree symbol. The other hoard of 51 mostly rectangular coins (pl. XIII, 7-9) buried in a wide-mouthed pottery vase (pl. XIII, 10) was found in the same square and at the same depth. These coins contained the inscription *Agodaka Agācha Janapadasa* with tree in railing on the obverse; and bull, lion and in three instances composite animals with part of the same inscription on the reverse. These coins establish the identity of Agrohā with the ancient *Agrodaka*, perhaps founded by Agra, the reputed fore-father of the Agrawals.

A list of the coins is given below :—

S. No.	Size		Weight	Description	
	L.	B.			
1	.57	.56	20 grs.	Obv.	*agacha janapadasa*.. and tree in railing.
				Rev.	*gācha jana*.. and bull standing to right.
2	.55	.52	24 "	Obv.	*ga*.. *janapadasa* and tree in railing.
				Rev.	*jana*.. and bull standing to left.
3	.60	.54	34 "	Obv.	*agacha ja*.. and tree in railing.
				Rev.	Bull standing to left probably in rayed circle.
4	.58	.58	30 "	Obv.	....*gacha janapadasa* and tree in railing.
				Rev.	..*goda*.... and bull standing to right.
5	.54	.52	20 "	Obv.	*agodake agachjana*....and tree in railing.
				Rev.	Bull standing to right.
6	.63	.51	26 "	Obv.	*agoda-agach janapa*.. and tree in railing.
				Rev.	Bull standing to right & indistinct inscription.
7	.50	.47	18 "	Obv.	*agodake agācha janapa* and the tree in railing.
				Rev.	Bull standing to left in rayed circle.
8	.58	.58	29 "	Obv.	Indistinct inscription; tree in railing.
				Rev.	Bull (blurred) standing to right.
9	.57	.56	30 "	Obv.	....*goda*....tree effaced.
				Rev.	Bull standing to right.
10	.66	.48	15 "	Obv.	*agodake-gāch*.. and tree (damaged).
				Rev.	Bull standing to right (?)
11	.55	.52	33 "	Obv.	Tree, inscription effaced.
				Rev.	Blurred.
12	.58	.55	25 "	Obv.	....*agāchaja*.. and tree in railing.
				Rev.	Bull standing to right (blurred).

S. No.	Size		Weight		Description
	L.	B.			
13	.54	.50	13 grs.	Obv.	Blurred.
				Rev.	Bull standing to right.
14	.58	.48	13 "	Obv.	......*gācha*..
				Rev.	Blurred.
15	.68	.58	28 "	Obv.	..*janapadasa* and two trees.
				Rev.	Bull standing to left.
16	.53	.53	22 "	Obv.	Tree. Indistinct inscription.
				Rev.	Bull standing to left, very faint.
17	.55	.54	22 "	Obv.	.*napadasa*.. and tree in railing.
				Rev.	*agodake agā*.. An uncertain objecs which may be a lion (?).
18	.57	.52	22 "	Obv.	Tree, blurred.
				Rev.	........indistinct.
19	.61	.55	35 "	Obv.	..*agacha janapada*..again *janapa*..and tree in railing
				Rev.	Bull standing to right in circle. Below bull in the left hand corner is some uncertain object.
20	.57	.55	30 "	Obv.	..*cha. janapa*.. and tree in railing.
				Rev.	Bull head looking right.
21	.53	.52	29 "	Obv.	...*janapa*. ..and tree, blurred.
				Rev.	Part of bull; inscription indistinct.
22	.69	.51	31 "	Obv.	*agodake agācha janapa*.. and tree in railing.
				Rev.	some composite animal as on No. 37.
23	.62	.57	34 "	Obv.	*agodake gācha jana* and tree in railing .
				Rev.	Lion looking right in circle.
24	.56	.55	32 "	Obv.	..*gacha*.. and tree in railing.
				Rev.	Bull standing to right in rayed circle.
25	.66	.58	24 "	Obv.	....*dasa*.... and tree.
				Rev.	Blurred.
26	.59	.51	24 "	Obv.	..*gācha janapada*..and tree in railing.
				Rev.	Lower part of bull standing to right in rayed circle.
27	.51	.49	31 "	Obv.	..*cha janapadasa* and tree in railing.
				Rev.	Bull standing to right, blurred.
28	.57 (thickness·07)	.49	34 "	Obv.	*a..da agācha janapada (sa)* and tree.
				Rev.	Composite animal with bull's body and owl's head with two large glaring eyes in a circle.
29	.60	.58	40 "	Obv.	*agodake agācha janapada* and tree.
				Rev.	Bull standing to right.
30	.62	.52	42 "	Obv.	Indistinct.
				Rev.	Bull standing to right in circle.
31	.63	.54	32 "	Obv.	The inscription....*dake agācha janapadasa*.. is twice repeated ; no tree.
				Rev.	Lion looking right.

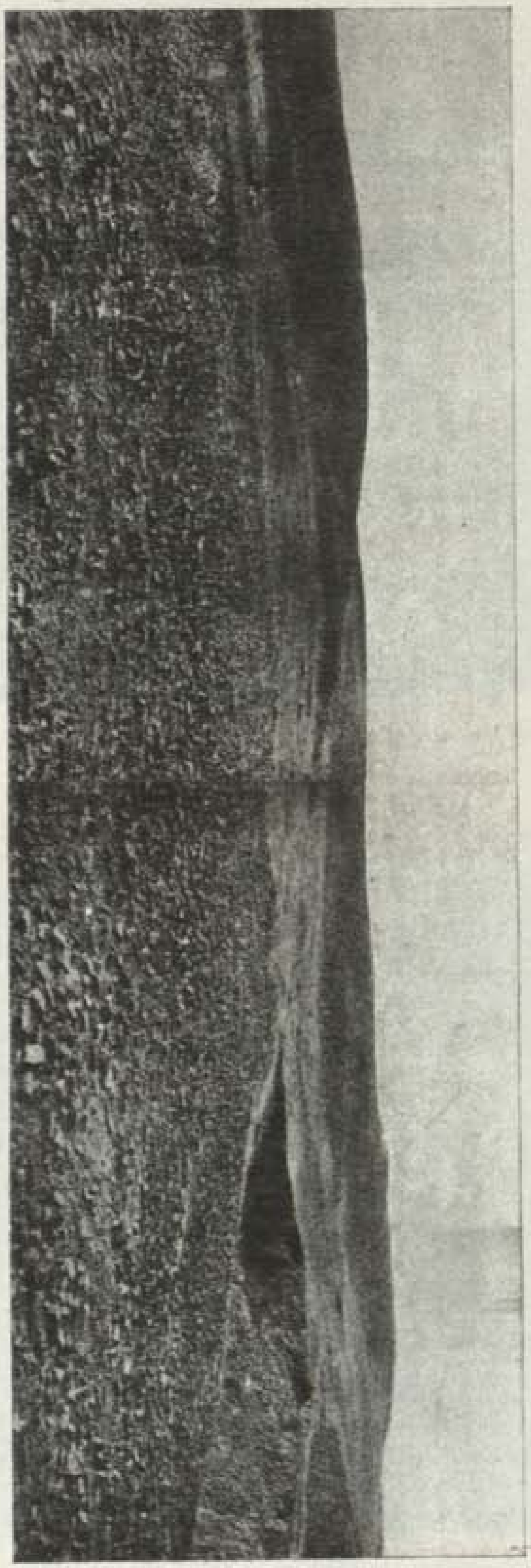
S. No.	Size L.	Size B.	Weight		Description
32	.59	.57	25 grs.	Obv.	Part of the tree. Blurred.
				Rev.	Bull standing to left in circle.
33	.55	.50	25 "	Obv.	Blurred.
				Rev.	Bull standing to right.
34	.63	51	34 "	Obv.	Tree and a few indistinct letters.
				Rev.	Bull standing to right in circle.
35	.62	.52	37 "	Obv.	*agodake agācha janapadasa* and tree in railing.
				Rev.	....*dasa*.. and bull standing to left in circle.
36	.58	.52	37 "	Obv.	.. *dake gācha janapada*.. tree in railing.
				Rev.	Bull standing to right in rayed circle.
37	.64 (thickness ·08)	.52	34 "	Obv.	.. *dake gācha janapa*.. and tree in railing.
				Rev.	A composite animal with bull's body and a double head, one being of elephant (?) and another of a lion ?
38	.56	.48	26 "	Obv.	*agodake*.. and tree in railing.
				Rev.	Bull standing right.
39	.62	.51	32 "	Obv.	*agoda aga*.... and tree in railing.
				Rev.	Lion (?)
40	.62	.57	34 "	Obv.	....*godake*.... and tree in railing. There are traces of a second tree.
				Rev.	Bull standing to left in circle.
41	.60	.57	35	Obv.	Inscription indistinct, tree in railing.
				Rev.	Bull standing to right in circle.
42	.52	.52	20 "	Obv.	Tree faintly visible.
				Rev.	Bull standing to left, faint.
43	.63 (thickness .09).	.51	45 "	Obv.	*agācha jana* and tree in railing.
				Rev.	..*gācha janapada* and lower part of bull standing to right.
44	.52	.53	28 "	Obv.	*agodake*.... tree in railing.
				Rev.	Bull standing to right.
45	.50	.50	30 "	Obv.	*agodake agacha ja*.... and tree in railing.
				Rev.	Lion standing to right.
46	.61	.60	36 "	Obv.	*agācha ja* ..*pada* and tree in railing.
				Rev.	Bull partly preserved, standing to right.
47	.60	.53	32 "	Obv.	*agodake*..*ga*.. and tree in railing partly preserved.
				Rev.	Bull standing to right.
48	.59	.56	41 "	Obv.	*agodake*....and tree in railing.
				Rev.	....*cha ja*..part of railing and lion looking right.
49	57	.55	40 "	Obv.	....*cha* .. *padasa* and tree in railing.
				Rev.	Blurred.

S. No.	Size		Weight		Description
	L.	B.			
50	.50	.50	25 grs.	Obv.	*Agoda*........ and tree in railing.
				Rev.	Bull standing to right in circle.
51	.56	.50	38 "	Obv.	.*godake agācha janapada*.. and tree in railing.
				Rev.	Bull standing to right.

From observations regarding signs of burning in the rooms and débris and acquisition of demolished and burnt sculptures, clay seal and manuscript and a deposit of ashes, etc., upto 12′ in the main trench, it may be concluded that the site was subjected to severe disturbance and therefore the finds—save perhaps in the pit—were disturbed. The recovery of Indo-Greek coins and the *Agodaka* coins in the pit have so far established the antiquity of the place to about the 2nd century B. C. It is therefore possible that excavations on a large scale at this place may yield important antiquities of an earlier period.

GIPD—M—17 Deptt of Arch.—30.1-52—500

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General view of Agrohā Mound.



A. General view of trench with buildings of 1st and 2nd strata.



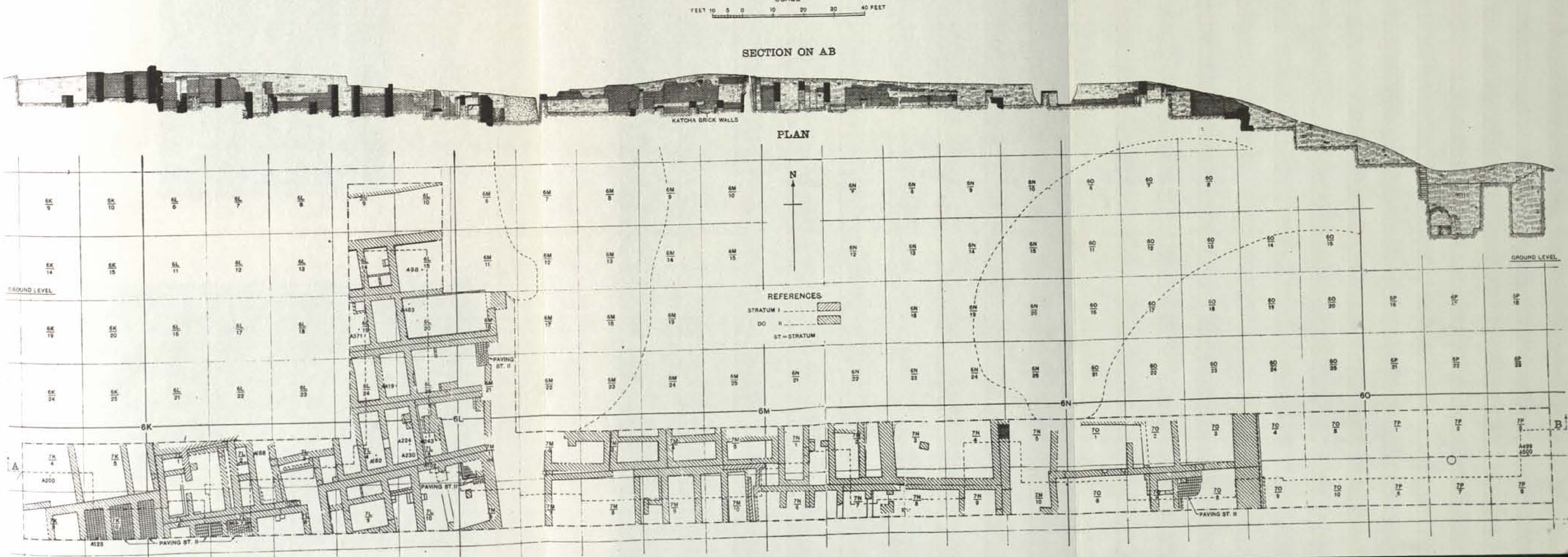
B. View of deep pits excavated in the eastern slope of the mound.

EXCAVATIONS AT AGROHA

TRENCH A

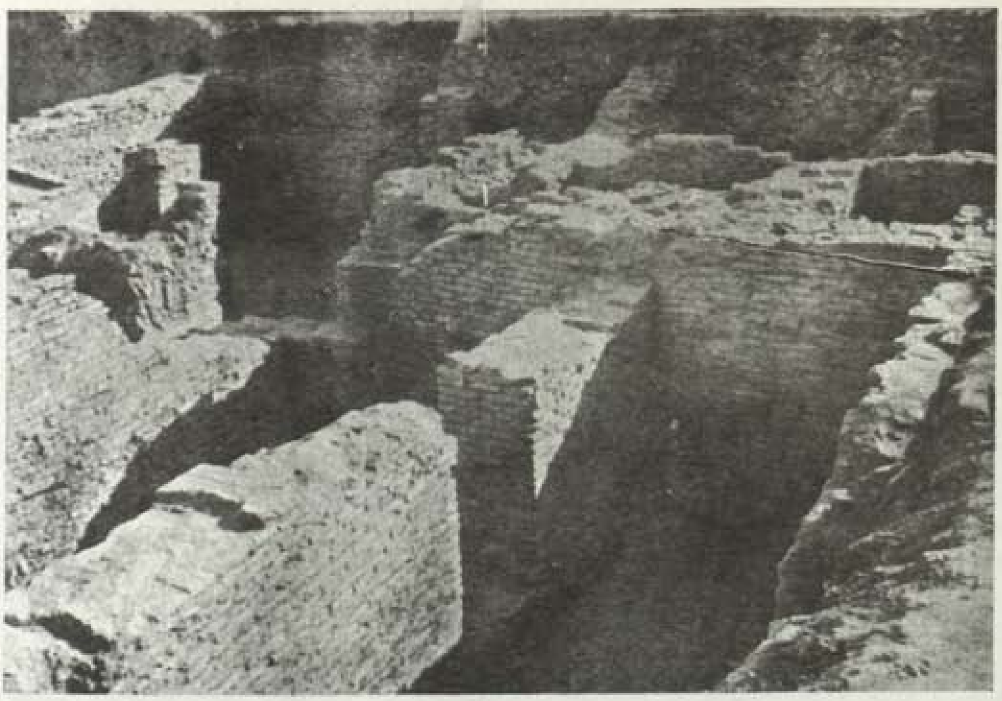
1938-39

SCALE

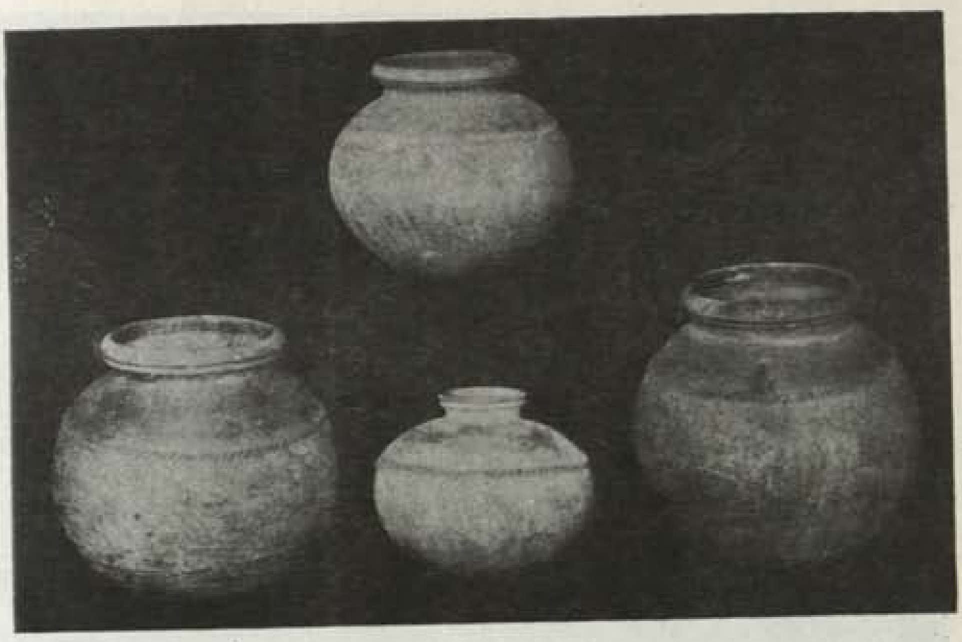




A. Shrine in a wall in square 7L/2.



B. Close view of structures in stratum II.



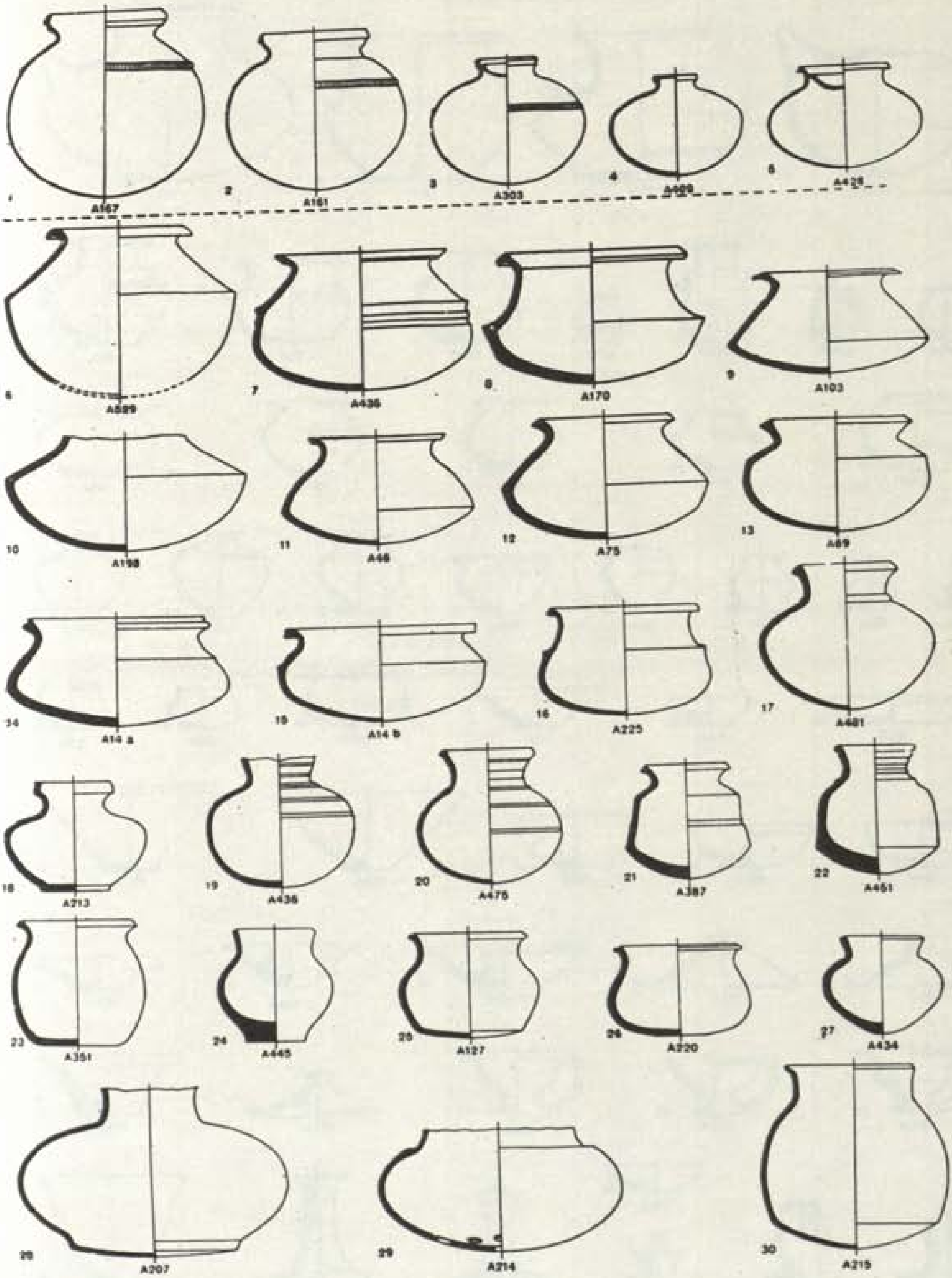


Specimens of pottery.

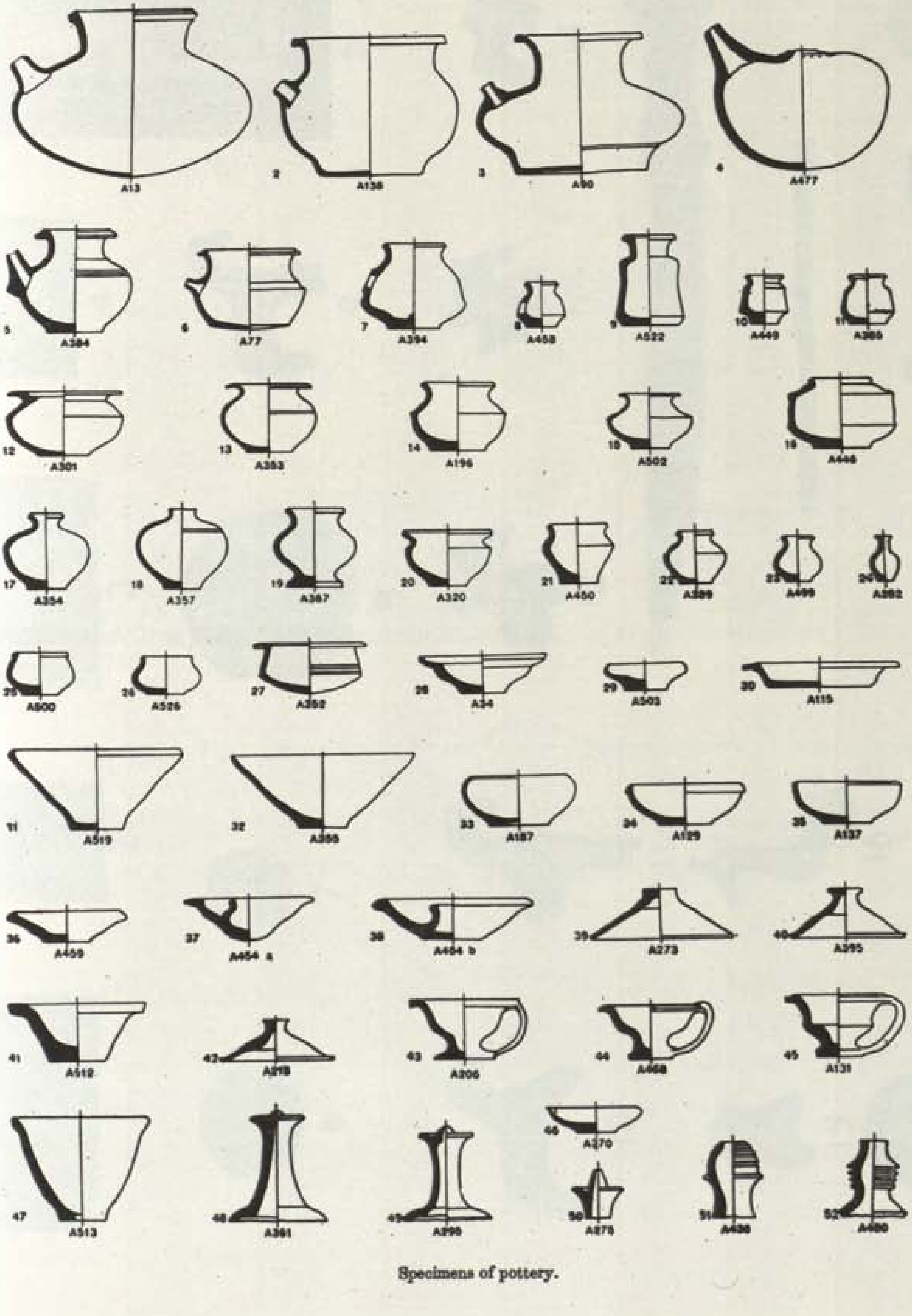




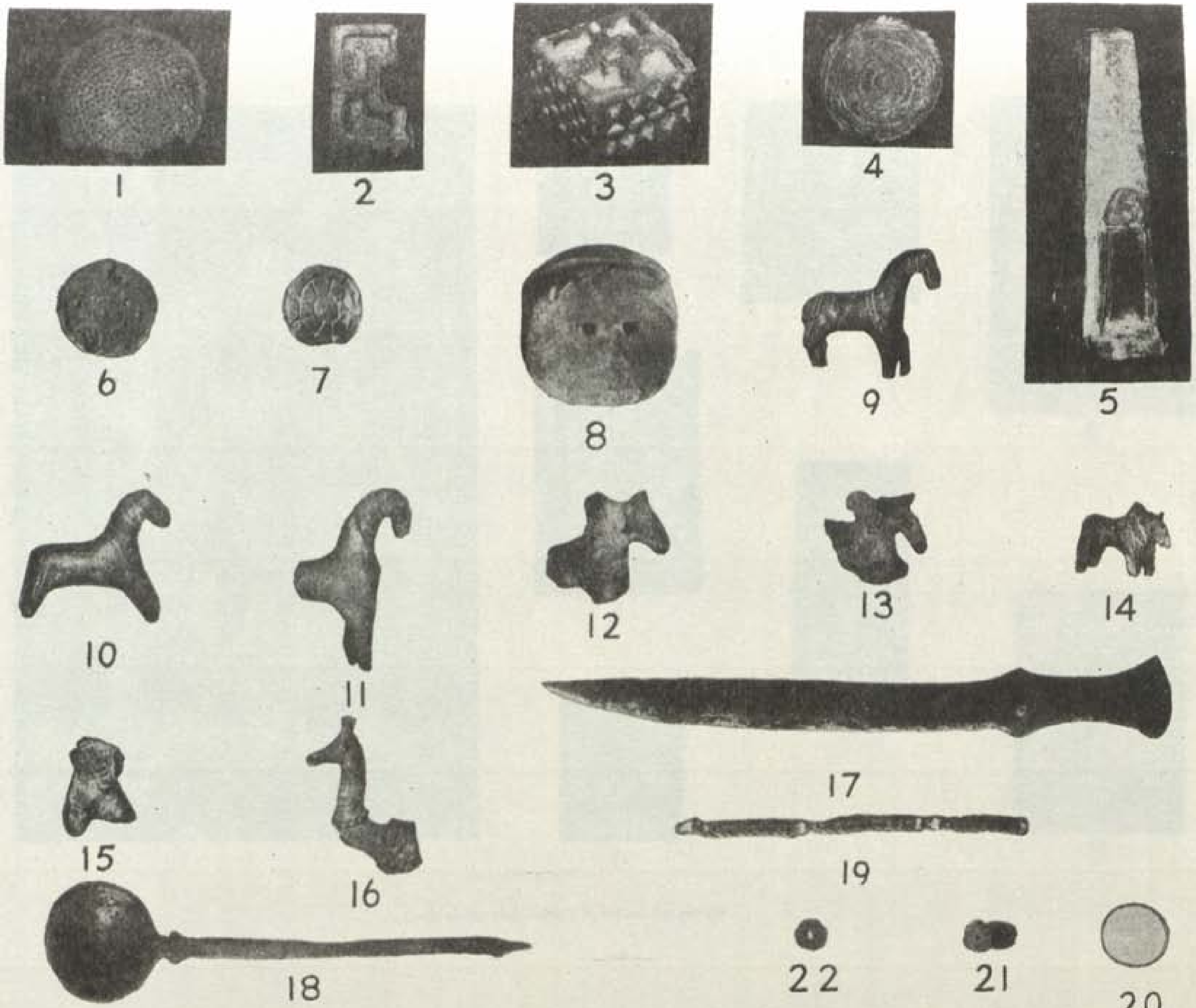
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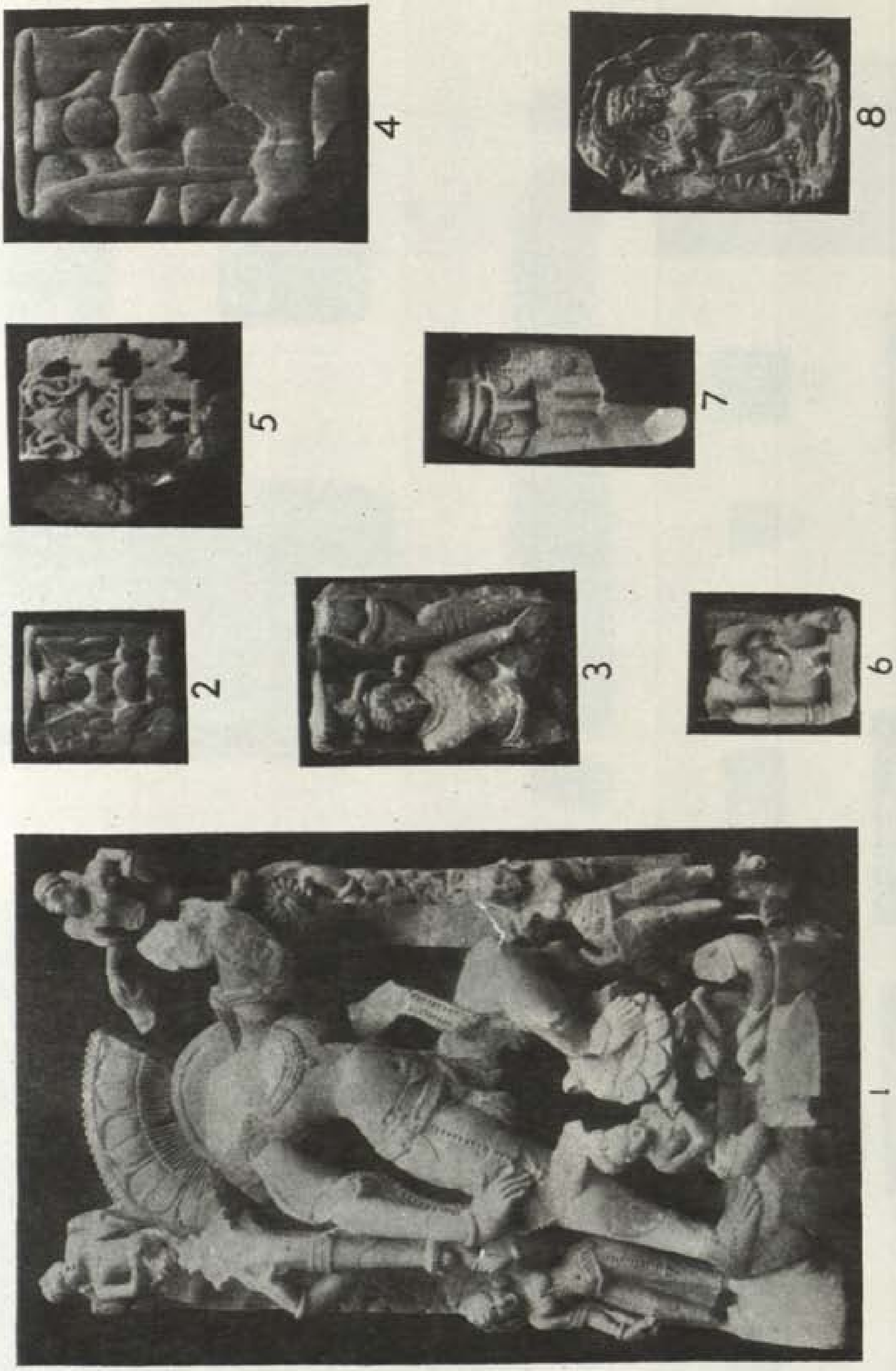
Specimens of pottery.



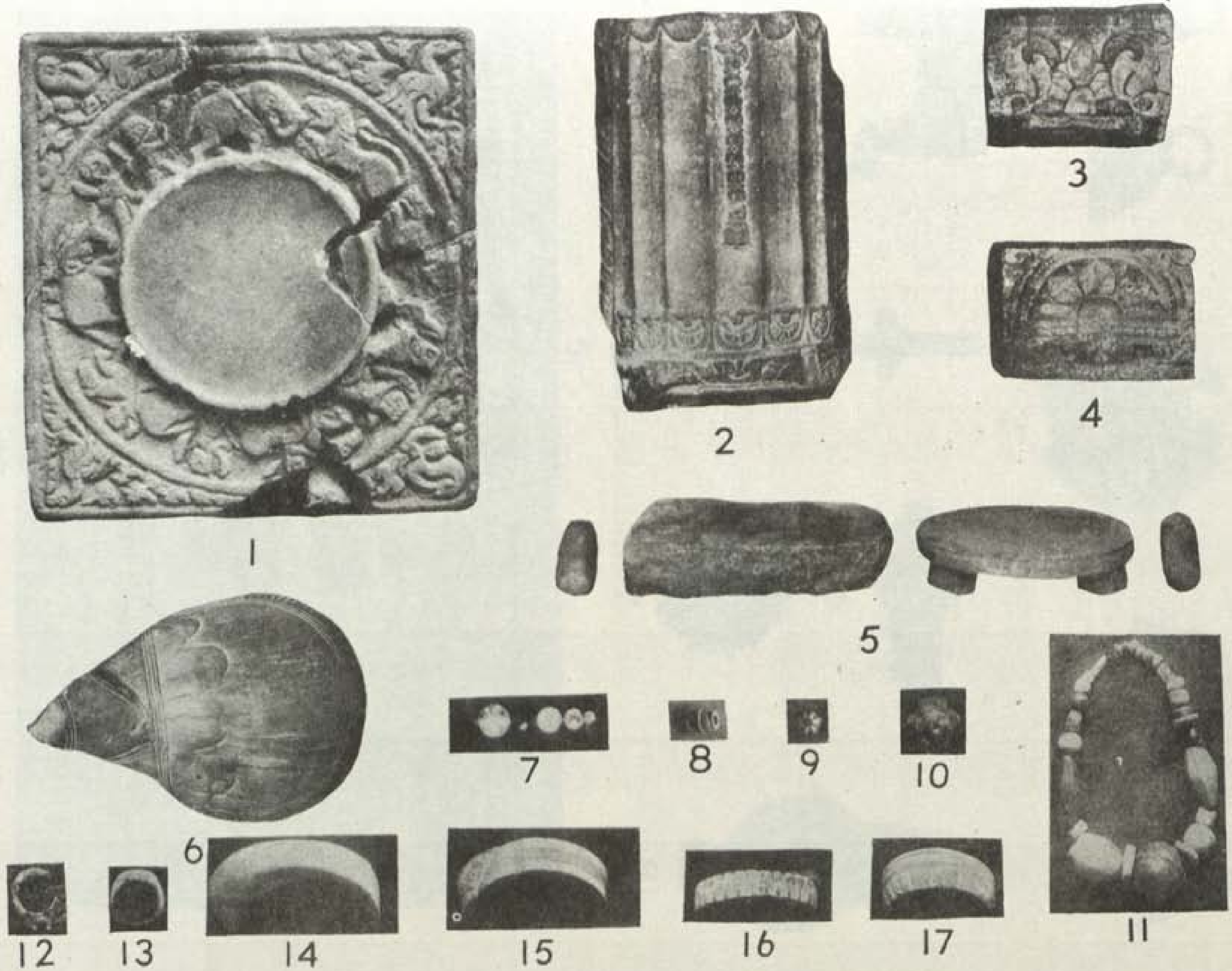
Specimens of pottery.



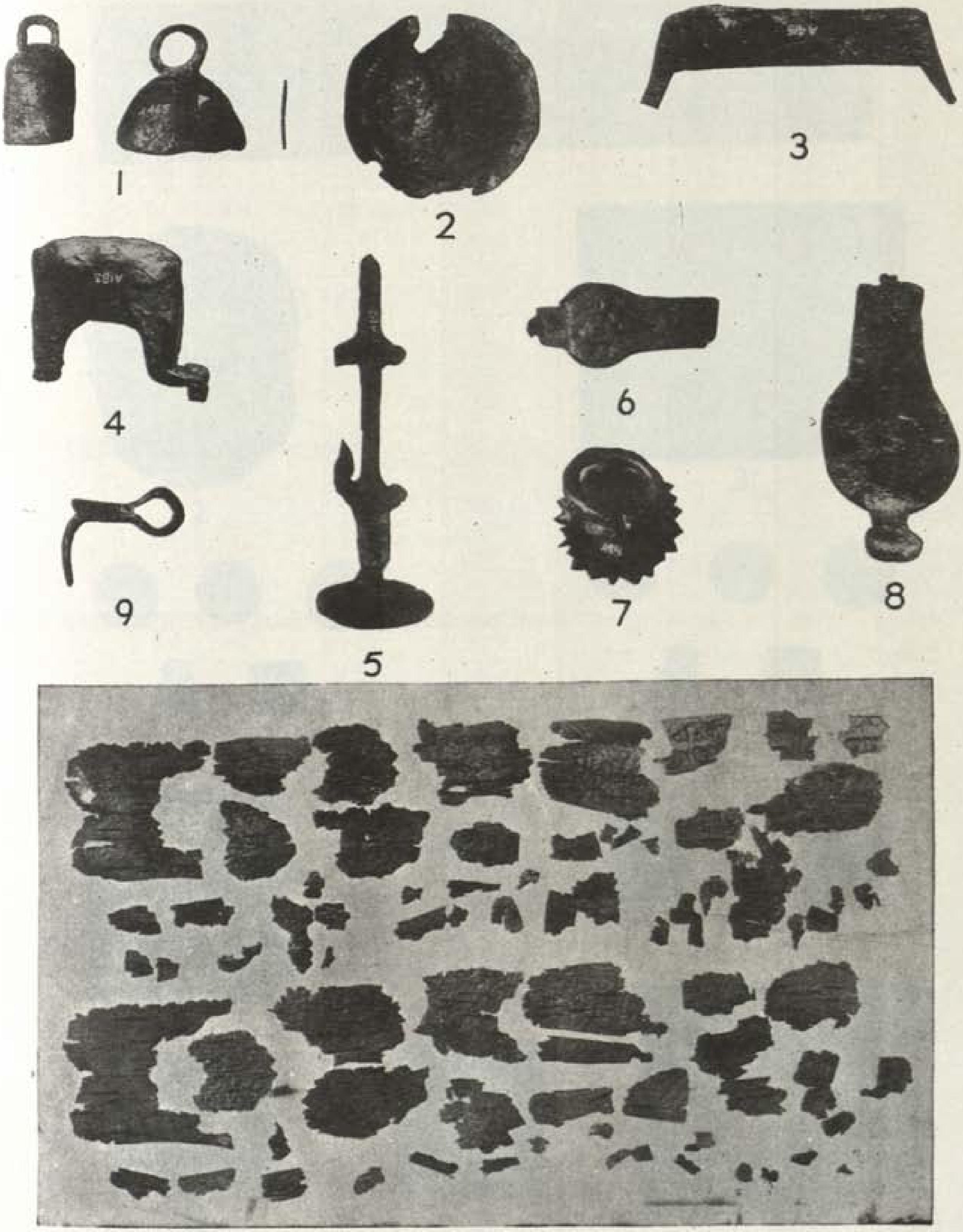
1—16, miscellaneous terracotta objects ; 17—22, copper objects.



1—7, stone sculptures; 8, terracotta plaque.



1—5, stone objects ; 6, spoon of horn ; 7—11, beads ; 12—17, personal ornaments.



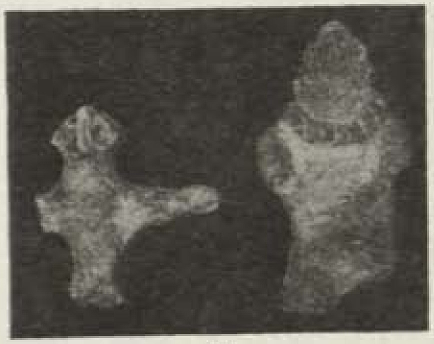
1—9, objects of metal ; 10, fragments of birch bark manuscript.



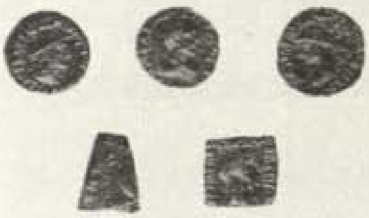
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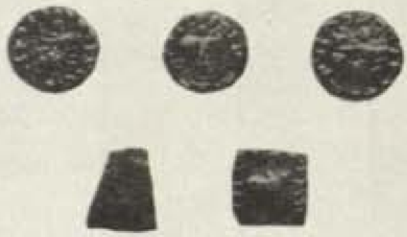
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3



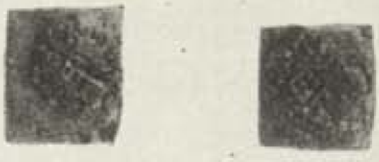
4



5



6



7



8



9



10

1, inscribed terracotta tablet ; 2, clay seal ; 3, terracotta figurines ; 4—10, coins and two pots containing them.